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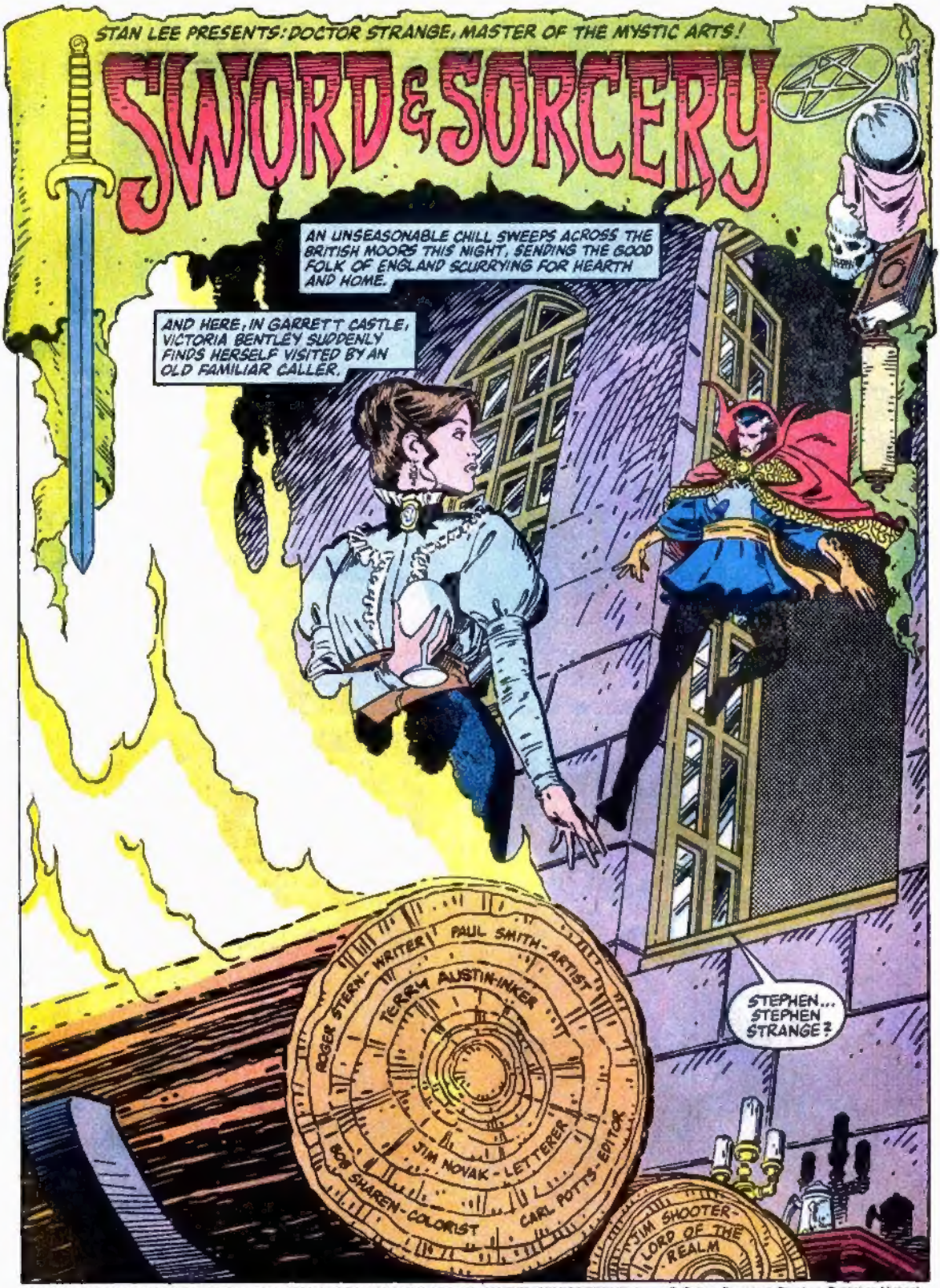
STAN LEE PRESENTS: DOCTOR STRANGE, MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS!
SWORD & SORCERY
AN UNSEASONABLE CHILL SWEEPS ACROSS THE BRITISH MOORS THIS NIGHT, SENDING THE GOOD FOLK OF ENGLAND SCURRYING FOR HEARTH AND HOME.
AND HERE, IN GARRETT CASTLE, VICTORIA BENTLEY SUDDENLY FINDS HERSELF VISITED BY AN OLD FAMILIAR CALLER.
STEPHEN... STEPHEN STRANGE?
ROGER STERN - WRITER
PAUL SMITH - ARTIST
TERRY AUSTIN - INKER
JIM NOVAK - LETTERER
BOB SHAREN - COLORIST
CARL POTTS - EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER - LORD OF THE REALM

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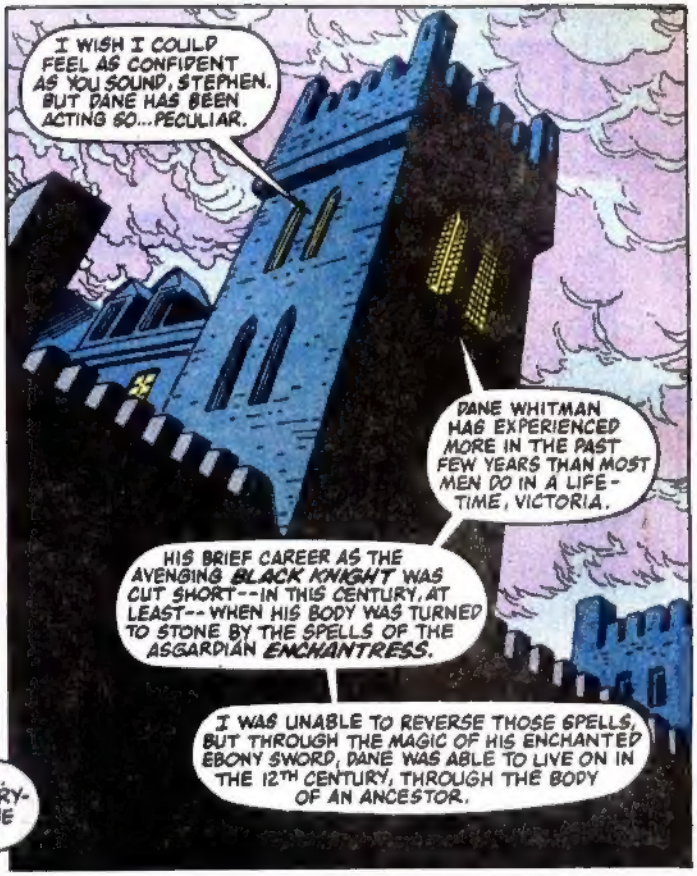
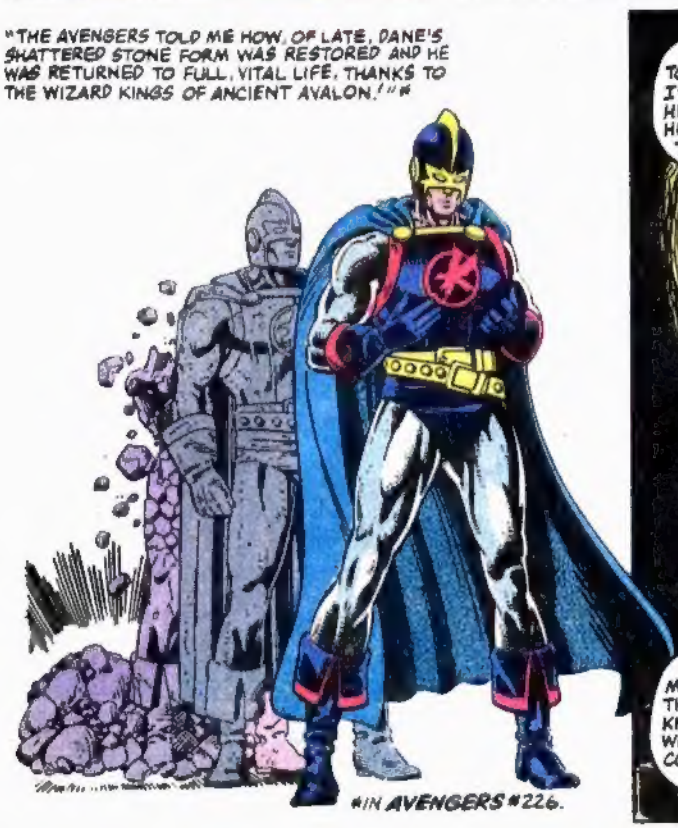
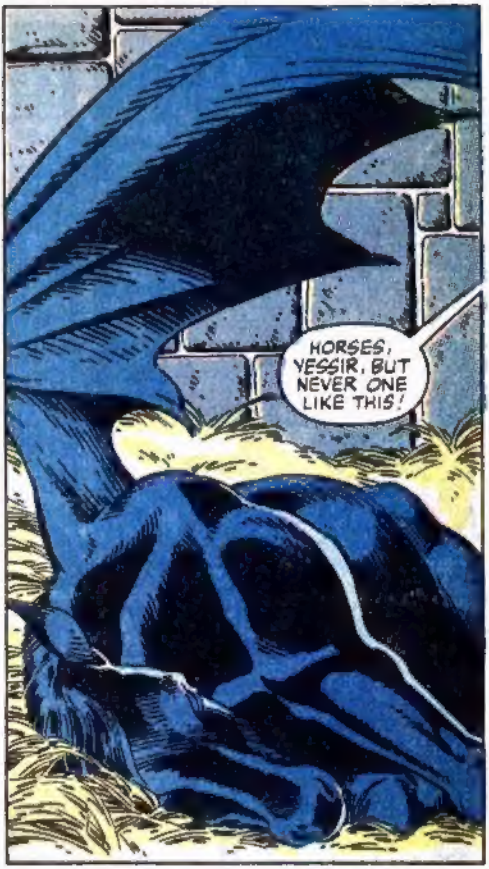
OH, STEPHEN! THANK HEAVENS, YOU'RE HERE AT LAST!
YOUR CALL SOUNDED SO URGENT THAT I FLEW DIRECTLY HERE UPON ARRIVING IN ENGLAND!
THERE NOW... I'M SURE EVERYTHING WILL BE ALL RIGHT!


I WISH I COULD FEEL AS CONFIDENT AS YOU SOUND, STEPHEN. BUT DANE HAS BEEN ACTING SO...PECULIAR.
DANE WHITMAN HAS EXPERIENCED MORE IN THE PAST FEW YEARS THAN MOST MEN DO IN A LIFETIME, VICTORIA.
HIS BRIEF CAREER AS THE AVENGING BLACK KNIGHT WAS CUT SHORT--IN THIS CENTURY, AT LEAST-- WHEN HIS BODY WAS TURNED TO STONE BY THE SPELLS OF THE ASGARDIAN ENCHANTRESS.
I WAS UNABLE TO REVERSE THOSE SPELLS, BUT THROUGH THE MAGIC OF HIS ENCHANTED EBONY SWORD, DANE WAS ABLE TO LIVE ON IN THE 12TH CENTURY, THROUGH THE BODY OF AN ANCESTOR.


"THE AVENGERS TOLD ME HOW, OF LATE, DANE'S SHATTERED STONE FORM WAS RESTORED AND HE WAS RETURNED TO FULL, VITAL LIFE, THANKS TO THE WIZARD KINGS OF ANCIENT AVALON!"#
#IN AVENGERS #226.

Y-YES, FROM WHAT DANE'S TOLD ME, THAT'S ALL TRUE. I'VE BEEN STAYING HERE AS HIS GUEST, TRYING TO HELP HIM READJUST TO LIFE IN THE HERE AND NOW, BUT...
BUT?
HE'S BECOME SO MOODY...SO UNLIKE THE DANE WHITMAN I KNEW! AND NOW--! WELL, YOU'LL SEE! COME, I'M SURE WE'LL FIND HIM...

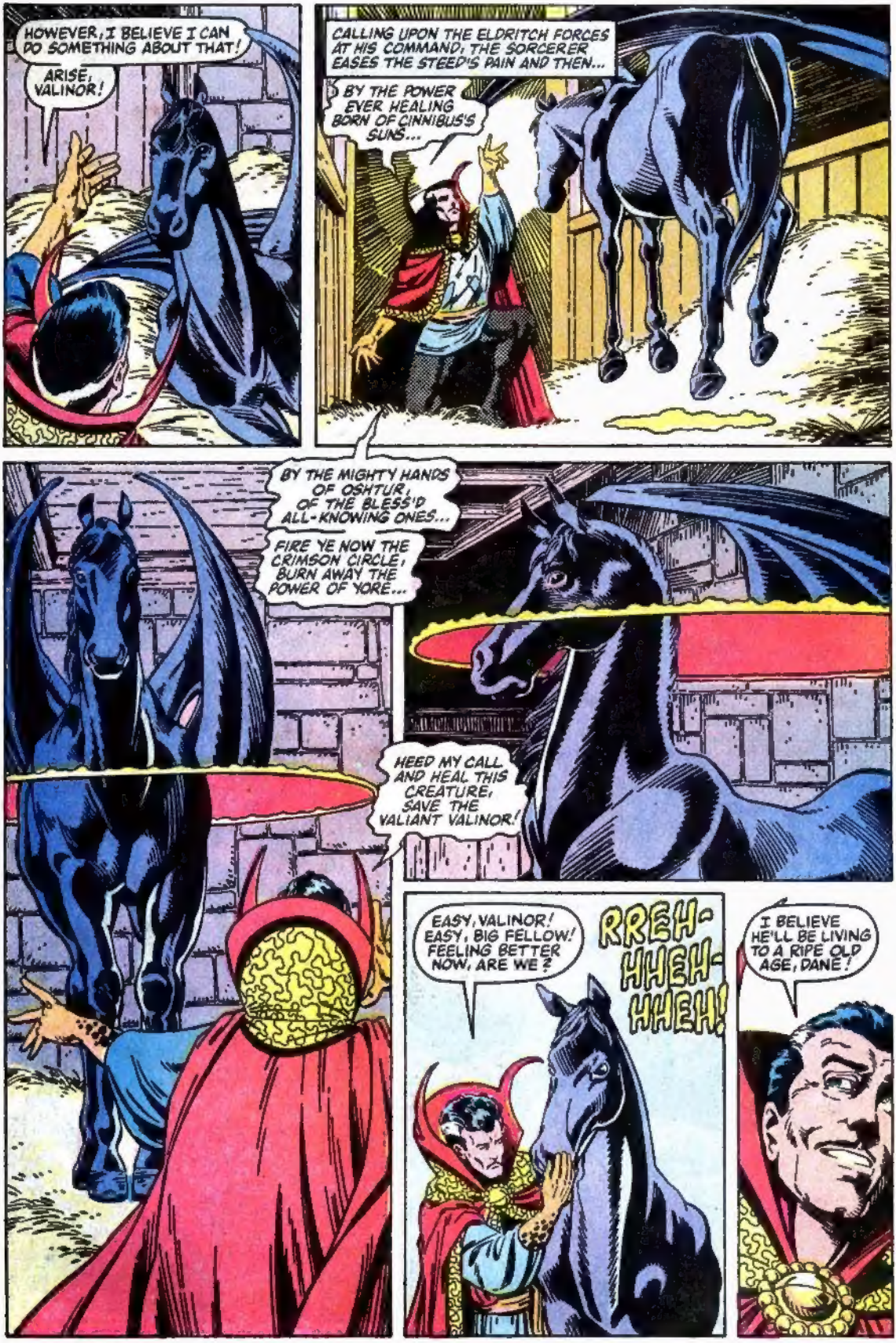
"...DOWN IN THE STABLES!"
DON'T JUST STAND THERE WITH YOUR MOUTH HANGING OPEN! YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO BE SO GOOD WITH ANIMALS...WELL...CURE HIM!
MISTER WHITMAN, I DINNA KNOW HOW TO START! I'VE BEEN DOCTORIN' ANIMALS FOR TWENTY YEARS, AN' NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!
WHAT, NEVER SEEN A HORSE DOWN IN HIS STALL?!

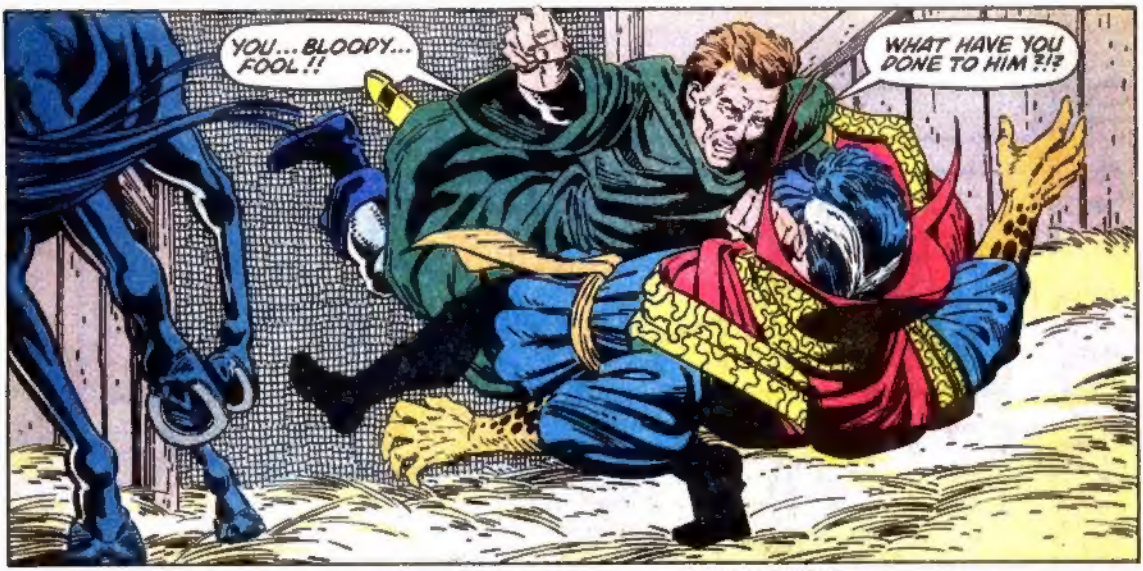

HORSES, YESSIR, BUT NEVER ONE LIKE THIS!

BAH! AND YOU CALL YOURSELF A VETERINARIAN!
GO EASY ON THE MAN, DANE. COUNTRY VETS ARE MORE ACCUSTOMED TO SEEING TWO-HEADED CALVES THAN BAT-WINGED STALLIONS!
WHO ASKED YOU TO--! EH?
DOCTOR STRANGE?!

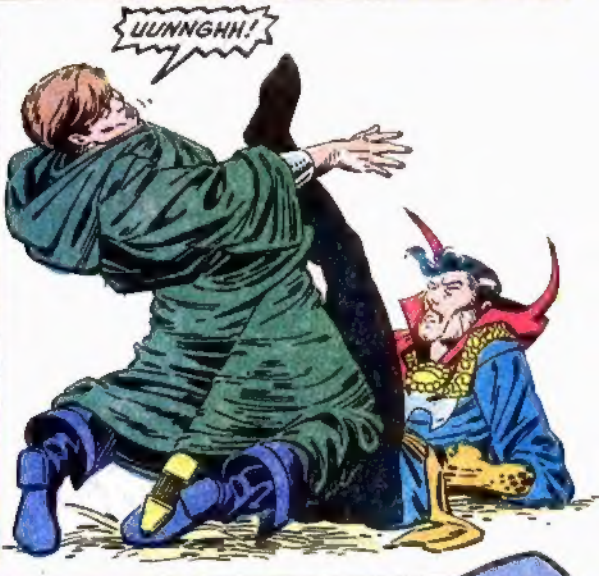
THANK AVALON, YOU'RE HERE! VALINOR IS DOWN IN HIS STALL, AND NO ONE SEEMS TO KNOW WHAT'S WRONG! YOU MUST SAVE HIM!
I'LL SEE WHAT I CAN DO, DANE!

THE HIGH DRUIDS OF AVALON GAVE ME VALINOR. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'D DO IF I LOST HIM.
HMMM...YES, THERE IS GREAT MAGIC AT WORK HERE. BUT IT'S MAGIC THAT HAS GONE BAD!

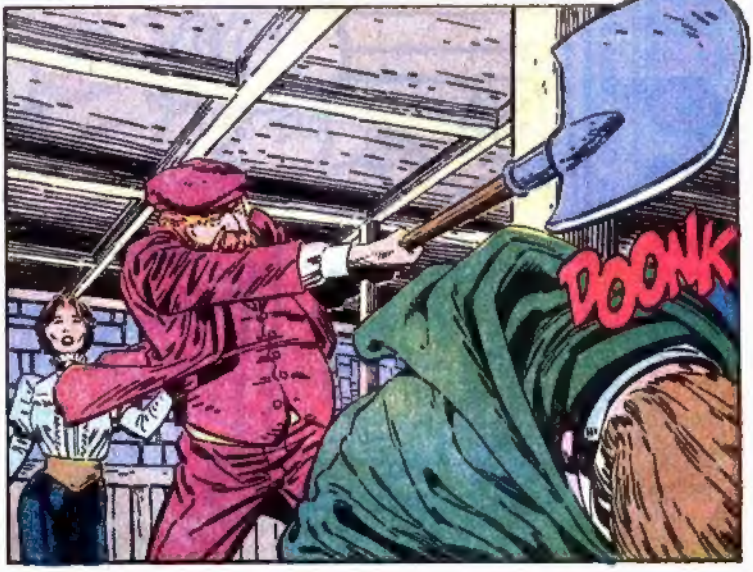

HOWEVER, I BELIEVE I CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT THAT!
ARISE, VALINOR!
CALLING UPON THE ELDRITCH FORCES AT HIS COMMAND, THE SORCERER EASES THE STEED'S PAIN AND THEN...
BY THE POWER EVER HEALING BORN OF CINNIBUS'S SUNS...
BY THE MIGHTY HANDS OF OSHTUR, OF THE BLESS'D ALL-KNOWING ONES...
FIRE YE NOW THE CRIMSON CIRCLE, BURN AWAY THE POWER OF YORE...
HEED MY CALL AND HEAL THIS CREATURE, SAVE THE VALIANT VALINOR!
EASY, VALINOR! EASY, BIG FELLOW! FEELING BETTER NOW, ARE WE?
RREH-HHEH-HHEH!
I BELIEVE HE'LL BE LIVING TO A RIPE OLD AGE, DANE!


YOU... BLOODY... FOOL!!
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO HIM?!?

DANE, GET CONTROL OF YOURSELF! THE MAGIC WHICH GAVE VALINOR HIS WINGS WAS ONLY EVER MEANT TO WORK IN ANCIENT AVALON! REMOVED FROM THAT REALM, THE SPELLS BECAME FOULED... THEY WERE KILLING HIM!


UUNNGHH!

FIEND! YOU COME IN THE GUISE OF A FRIEND, AND THEN YOU MUTILATE MY MOUNT!
I'LL KILL YOU FOR THAT!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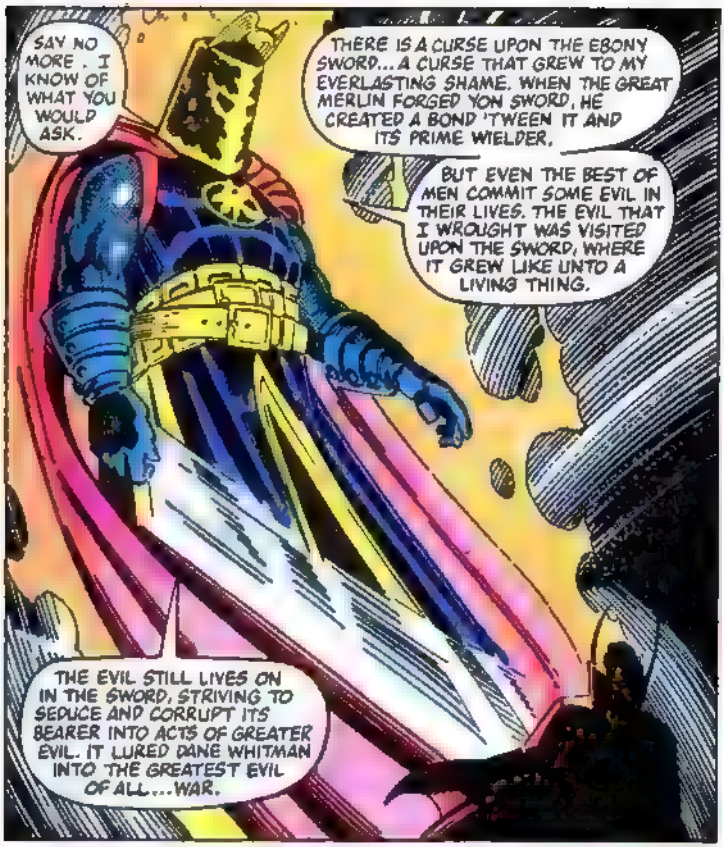
I-I-IS HE AWRIGHT, SIR? I DINNA MEAN TO HURT 'IM ...ONLY TO STOP 'IM FROM RUNNING YE THROUGH!
HE'LL BE FINE. IN HIS OVERWROUGHT STATE, THE SHOCK WAS ENOUGH TO ROB HIM OF CONSCIOUSNESS...
...AIDED, OF COURSE, BY MY SILENT SPELL OF MORPHEUS.
RIGHT NOW, I THINK THAT SLEEP WILL DO HIM A WORLD OF GOOD. WILL YOU HELP ME GET HIM TO BED, VICTORIA?
O-OF COURSE, STEPHEN.
PLEASE SEND ME A BILL FOR YOUR TROUBLE, DR. MACRAE. OH... AND I'D APPRECIATE IT IF YOU DIDN'T MENTION WHAT HAPPENED HERE TO ANYONE.
NOT TO WORRY, YOUR LADYSHIP. I'M NOT SURE I BELIEVE IT MESELF!
SOON...
NOW DO YOU SEE, STEPHEN? HE'S... HE'S GONE MAD!
NO, NOT MAD... NOT QUITE. BUT HIS MIND HAS BECOME UNBALANCED.
WE CAN ONLY PRAY THAT IT IS WITHIN OUR POWER TO FIND THE CAUSE OF THAT UNBALANCE, AND PUT IT TO RIGHT!
WITH A THOUGHT, THE DOCTOR LETS LOOSE THE ENCHANTED EYE OF AGAMOTTO FROM HIS GOLDEN AMULET.
AND THEN...
BY THE ALL-REVEALING LIGHT, LET US SEE WHAT TORTURED THOUGHTS LURK BENEATH THIS TROUBLED BROW.

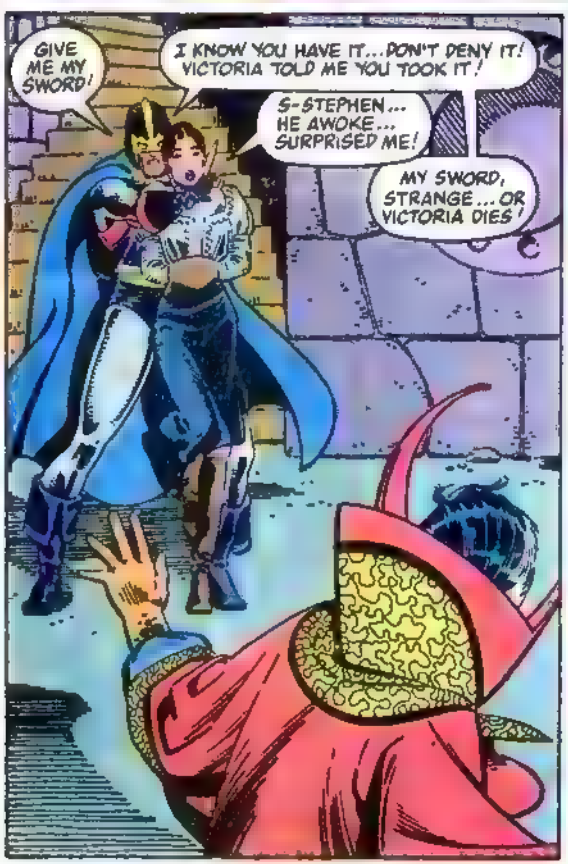
SUDDENLY, THE CHAMBER IS AWASH IN IMAGES. MEMORIES OF DANE WHITMAN'S LIFE IN THE 12TH CENTURY'S CRUSADES COME TO LIGHT...MEMORIES OF BURNING, PILLAGING, AND DEATH...
...MEMORIES OF HOW THE ERRANT BLACK KNIGHT LEARNED FIRSTHAND THAT NO WAR CAN EVER BE CALLED HOLY!
NO... NO MORE... PLEASE, NO MORE! DON'T WANT TO KILL ANYMORE! PLEASE... DON'T MAKE ME KILL!

WANT... WANT TO GO BACK... BACK... TO WHERE? ENGLAND?
WHY? NOTHING LEFT FOR ME THERE! I'VE... BEEN BETRAYED! BETRAYED BY ALL AROUND ME! EVEN VICTORIA... SHE TOOK IT... TOOK IT ALL!! BETRAYED!!
BETRAYED EVERYWHERE... EVERY TIME! BETRAYED BY MY OWN SWORD! NO... PLEASE... NO MORE KILLING!
NO MORE KILLING, DANE... NO MORE BETRAYAL. YOU WILL SLEEP NOW, AND IN SLEEP THE PAIN SHALL FADE.
WELL, PART OF HIS PROBLEM IS A DELAYED TRAUMA SYNDROME CAUSED BY HIS EXPERIENCES IN THE CRUSADES. BUT I'M AFRAID THAT SOMETHING EVEN GREATER MAY BE AT THE ROOT OF DANE'S PSYCHOSIS.
WHAT COULD HE HAVE MEANT... THAT YOU TOOK IT ALL?
HE MUST MEAN... THE ESTATE. I LOOKED AFTER THIS CASTLE WHILE HE WAS... GONE. BUT I HAD NO LEGAL POWER OF ATTORNEY OVER HIS ASSETS, IN TIME THE CASTLE WOULD HAVE BEEN SEIZED FOR NON-PAYMENT OF TAXES.
SO I MORTGAGED MY OWN PROPERTIES TO BUY IT AND KEEP IT OFF THE AUCTION BLOCK.
AND NOW HE IS EFFECTIVELY A GUEST IN HIS OWN HOME. YES, HIS MIND MIGHT EASILY CONSIDER THAT A BETRAYAL.
BUT HE ALSO CLAIMED THAT HIS SWORD HAD BETRAYED HIM. WHATEVER COULD HE HAVE MEANT BY THAT?
THERE IS GREAT MAGIC IN THIS EBON BLADE... IT COULD HOLD THE ANSWER TO DANE'S ERRATIC BEHAVIOR. I MUST CHECK THIS OUT AT ONCE.
KEEP A CLOSE WATCH OVER DANE, VICTORIA, AND LET ME KNOW IF HE STARTS RAVING AGAIN.
OH... YES, OF COURSE.
BUT AS THE SORCERER DISAPPEARS DOWN THE CORRIDOR...
THERE COULD BE MORE TO MY "BETRAYAL" THAN MERELY OWNING DANE'S CASTLE, STEPHEN. SEEING YOU AGAIN HAS AWAKENED OLD FEELINGS IN ME.
DOES DANE SOMEHOW SENSE THAT? DOES HE KNOW THAT I CARE MORE FOR YOU THAN I EVER COULD FOR HIM?

DOWN INTO THE VERY BOWELS OF THE CASTLE DESCENDS THE MYSTIC MASTER, SEEKING THAT WHICH HE HAD LAST BEHELD MONTHS AGO...
THERE... THE BRAZIER OF TRUTH!
I HAVE BUT TO IGNITE ITS SMOLDERING COALS TO LEARN IF WHAT I SUSPECT IS TRUE.
FLAMES OF THE FALTINE, ATTEND ME NOW...
AS THE WIZARD'S VOICE DROPS TO A MERE WHISPER...
...THE MYSTIC FLAME CALLED FORTH TWISTS AND TURNS, TAKING ON THE FORM OF A FIERY ELEMENTAL...
...A BLAZING LITTLE SPRITE WHICH JOYOUSLY STREAKS TO FIRE THE BRAZIER!
AND THEN FROM OUT OF THE BURNING EMBERS ARISES THE SHADE OF A MAN SOME 14 CENTURIES DEAD. FROM ACROSS THE GULF OF TIME, ECHOES THE EERIE VOICE...
STEPHEN STRANGE...YOU DARE DISTURB THE SLEEP OF SIR PERCY OF SCANDIA?!
FORGIVE ME, BUT I MUST. I HAVE QUESTIONS THAT CAN BE ANSWERED ONLY BY YOU... THE ORIGINAL BLACK KNIGHT OF CAMELOT!


SAY NO MORE. I KNOW OF WHAT YOU WOULD ASK.
THERE IS A CURSE UPON THE EBONY SWORD... A CURSE THAT GREW TO MY EVERLASTING SHAME. WHEN THE GREAT MERLIN FORGED YON SWORD, HE CREATED A BOND 'TWEEN IT AND ITS PRIME WIELDER.
BUT EVEN THE BEST OF MEN COMMIT SOME EVIL IN THEIR LIVES. THE EVIL THAT I WROUGHT WAS VISITED UPON THE SWORD, WHERE IT GREW LIKE UNTO A LIVING THING.
THE EVIL STILL LIVES ON IN THE SWORD, STRIVING TO SEDUCE AND CORRUPT ITS BEARER INTO ACTS OF GREATER EVIL. IT LURED DANE WHITMAN INTO THE GREATEST EVIL OF ALL... WAR.

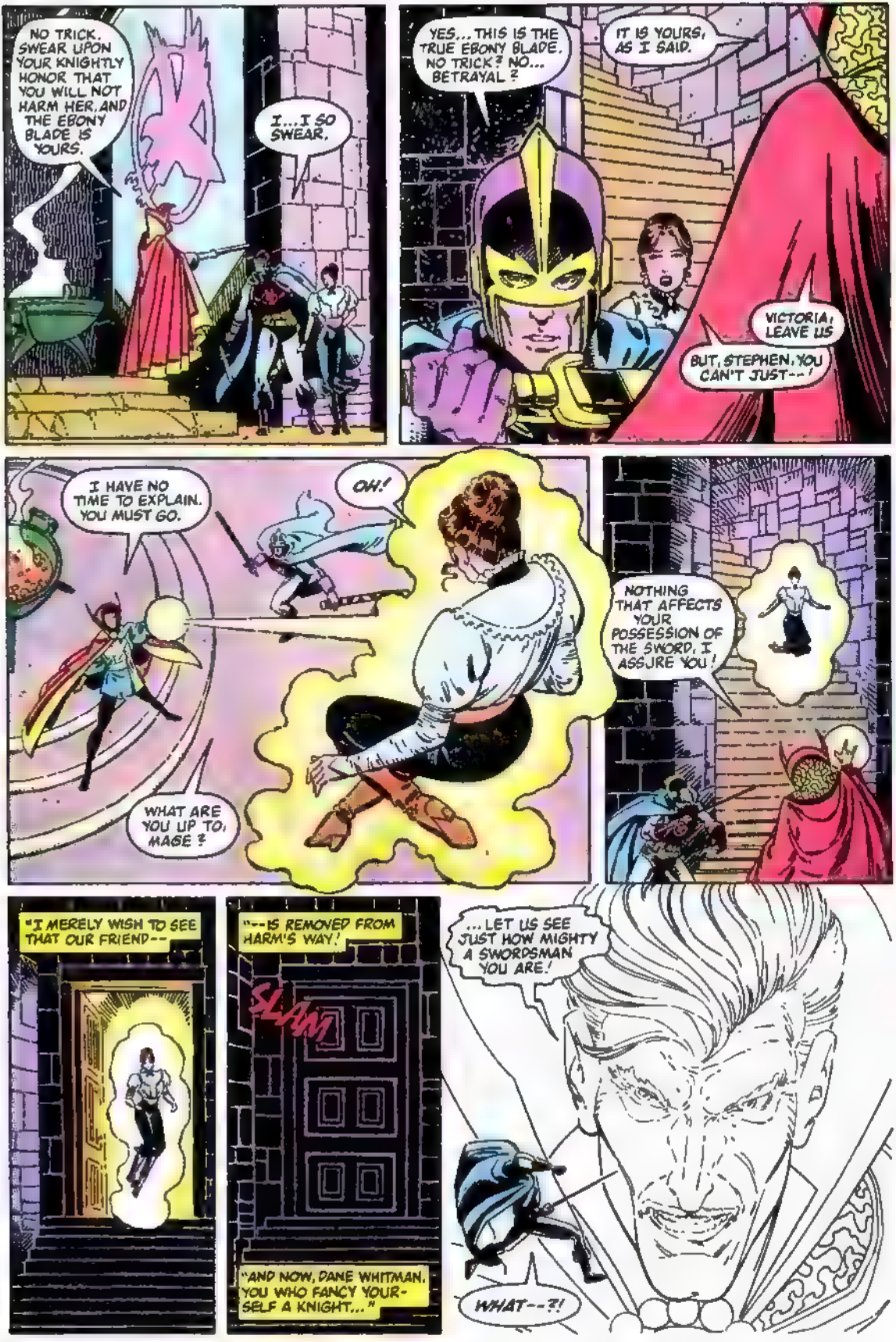
NOW, I FEAR THAT MY DESCENDANT NO LONGER HAS WILL ENOUGH TO RESIST THE SWORD'S MALEVOLENT CALL. SHOULD HE AGAIN WIELD IT IN ANGER, HE MAY DOOM HIMSELF... AND ME!
STRANGE!


GIVE ME MY SWORD!
I KNOW YOU HAVE IT... DON'T DENY IT! VICTORIA TOLD ME YOU TOOK IT!
S-STEPHEN... HE AWOKE... SURPRISED ME!
MY SWORD, STRANGE... OR VICTORIA DIES!

DANE, LISTEN TO YOURSELF! YOU DON'T WANT TO HARM VICTORIA! IT'S THE SWORD THAT'S MAKING YOU DO THIS! PUT DOWN THAT DAGGER AND--!

NO!! I WANT THE SWORD! IT'S MINE BY RIGHT... AND BY AVALON I WILL HAVE IT, ONE WAY OR ANOTHER!

VERY WELL. I AGREE TO YOUR TRADE... YOUR SWORD FOR VICTORIA'S LIFE.
EH? I'M WARNING YOU, STRANGE, IF THIS IS A TRICK--?


NO TRICK. SWEAR UPON YOUR KNIGHTLY HONOR THAT YOU WILL NOT HARM HER, AND THE EBONY BLADE IS YOURS.
I...I SO SWEAR.
YES... THIS IS THE TRUE EBONY BLADE. NO TRICK? NO... BETRAYAL?
IT IS YOURS, AS I SAID.
VICTORIA, LEAVE US
BUT, STEPHEN, YOU CAN'T JUST--!
I HAVE NO TIME TO EXPLAIN. YOU MUST GO.
OH!
WHAT ARE YOU UP TO, MAGE?
NOTHING THAT AFFECTS YOUR POSSESSION OF THE SWORD, I ASSURE YOU!
"I MERELY WISH TO SEE THAT OUR FRIEND--
"--IS REMOVED FROM HARM'S WAY!
SLAM
"AND NOW, DANE WHITMAN, YOU WHO FANCY YOURSELF A KNIGHT..."
...LET US SEE JUST HOW MIGHTY A SWORDSMAN YOU ARE!
WHAT--?!

FOR A SPLIT-SECOND, DANE IS BLINDED BY THE EXPANDING LIGHT OF THE MYSTIC'S VISAGE. AND WHEN HIS VISION CLEARS, GARRETT CASTLE HAS... CEASED TO BE!
FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL, SWORDSMEN HAVE--IN THEIR IGNORANCE--PITTED THEMSELVES AGAINST THE FORCES OF SORCERY. YOU HAVE AN ADVANTAGE OVER THOSE OAFS OF ANTIQUITY...
...YOUR SWORD IS ENCHANTED! SUPPOSEDLY, IT GRANTS YOU IMMUNITY TO THE POWERS GENERATED BY THE MYSTIC ARTS!
THAT I VERY MUCH DOUBT!
WHAT ARE YOU--?
WHAT AM I DOING? I SHOULD THINK THAT OBVIOUS! I CHALLENGE YOU TO A DUEL, DANE WHITMAN... YOUR SWORD AGAINST MY MAGIC... THROUGHOUT ALL THE MANY DIMENSIONS!
DO YOU ACCEPT? OR SHOULD I SEND YOU BACK TO HIDE IN YOUR PATHETIC CASTLE?
THE BLACK KNIGHT FEARS NO MAN!
HAVE AT THEE, FOOL!

YOU BLOCK MY SWORD WITH A FLAMING PIKE? THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE! IT CAN CLEAVE THROUGH A FOOT OF GOOD STEEL, MEETING LESS RESISTANCE THAN FROM A BLADE OF GRASS!
MY SORCERY IS MIGHTIER THAN COMMON STEEL!
I HATE DECEIVING AN OLD ALLY WITH SPELLS OF ILLUSION AND INVISIBILITY, BUT IT IS SADLY NECESSARY. THE EVIL IN HIS SWORD IS TOO INGRAINED TO BE BANISHED THROUGH CONJURATION ALONE.
I FIRST MUST MAKE CONTACT WITH DANE'S RATIONAL MIND, AND THAT IS IMPOSSIBLE IN HIS CURRENT STATE. I MUST FORCE HIM TO EXPEND SOME OF HIS MANIA AGAINST THE FOE HE IMAGINES ME TO BE!
BUT, AT THAT MOMENT, JUST A FEW DIMENSIONS AWAY...
THE SWORD-WIELDING IDIOT! HE WASTES HIS TIME FIGHTING NOTHING MORE THAN A CONJURED IMAGE OF DOCTOR STRANGE!
STILL, THIS IS A PUZZLING SIGHT. WHY WOULD DOCTOR STRANGE TAKE THE TIME TO BATTLE ONE OF HIS FELLOW MORTALS NOW?

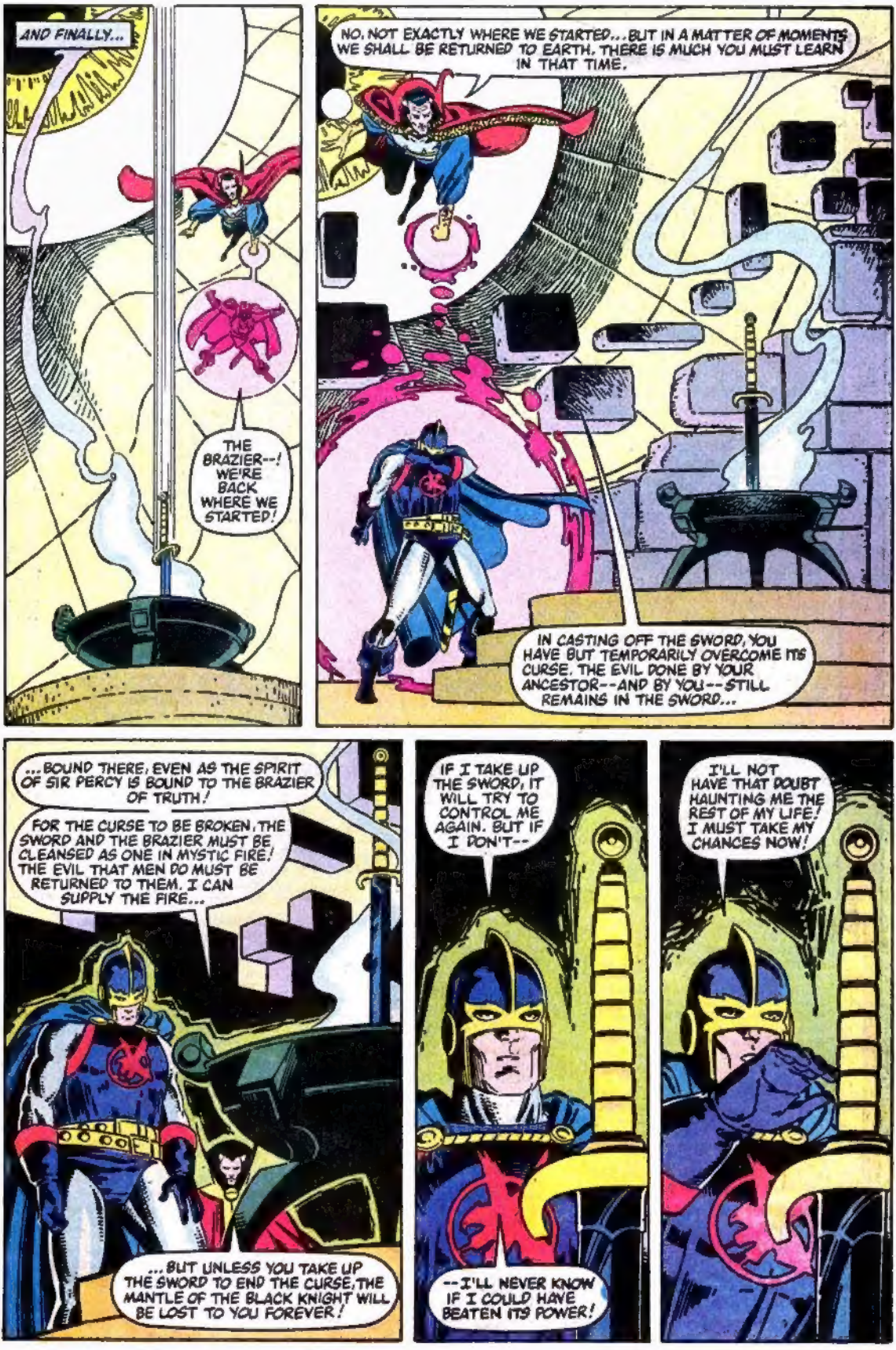
THERE ARE THE BEGINNINGS OF INSURRECTION HERE IN MY DARK DIMENSION...A REBELLION WITH WHICH THE ACCURSED CLEA HAS BEEN LINKED, AND AS CLEA HAS BEEN DISCIPLE TO DOCTOR STRANGE--
--HE MUST BE THE TRUE POWER BEHIND THIS REVOLT! HE HAS EVER THWARTED MY PLANS OF CONQUEST... AND ONLY HE WOULD DARE TO OPPOSE THE UNRELENTING UMAR!
THAT HE IS CONFIDENT ENOUGH TO ENGAGE ANOTHER FOE--IN THE MIDST OF HIS PLOTTING AGAINST ME--IS MOST GALLING!
I THINK HIS OPPONENT COULD USE A HELPING HAND IN SEEING THROUGH THE SORCERER'S DECEPTION!
AND AS UMAR UNLEASHES A DEVASTATING MYSTIC BOLT THROUGH HER DIMENSIONAL WINDOW--
--THE MAN SHE ERRONEOUSLY BELIEVES TO BE LEADING HER REALM'S UPRISING FEELS ITS FULL EFFECTS!
AAARGH!
WHAT THE--?! TWO DOCTOR STRANGES?! NO...THE ONE I WAS FIGHTING FADES!

IT WAS ALL A TRICK! YOU HAD ME CHASING SHADOWS!
MISTRESS UMAR--!
NOT NOW!
BUT THE REBELS ARE ABOUT! YOU ASKED TO BE INFORMED!
OH, VERY WELL! SHOW ME ..BUT BE QUICK ABOUT IT!
NOW, STRANGE...
...NOW THERE SHALL BE A RECKONING!
YOU TAUNTED ME...PLAYED ME FOR THE FOOL WITH YOUR ILLUSIONS YOU MUTILATED MY WINGED MOUNT, AND...YES, IT MUST HAVE BEEN YOU WHO TURNED VICTORIA AGAINST ME!
TO THINK THAT I ONCE ALLIED MYSELF WITH SORCERERS SUCH AS YOU! NO, NOT SUCH AS YOU! THE MASTERS OF AVALON WERE HONORABLE MEN...
...AS WAS THE CREATOR OF MY SWORD! THINK OF THAT, STRANGE!
IT WAS A SORCERER WHO FORGED THE INSTRUMENT OF YOUR DEATH!

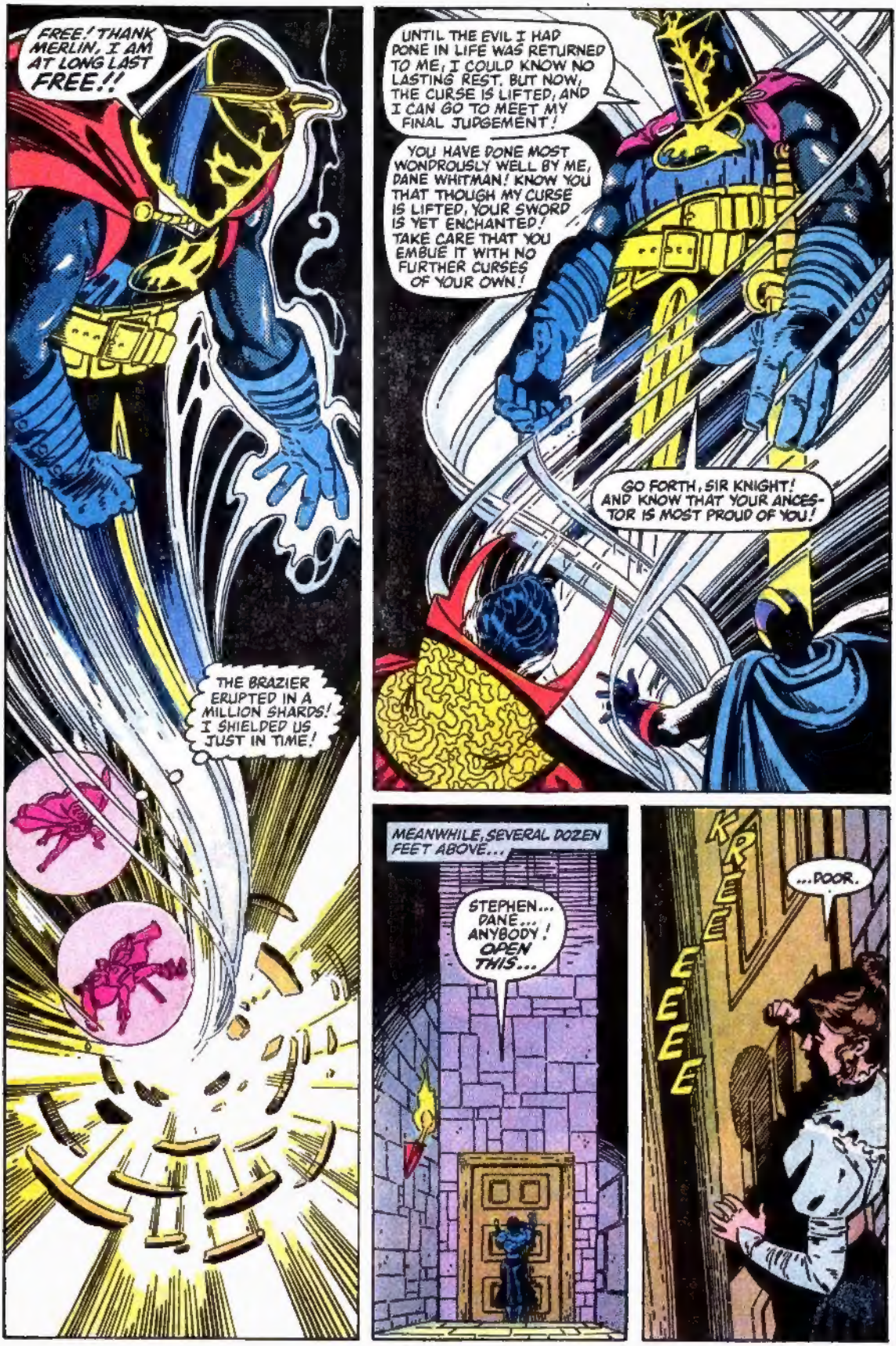
BUT, AN INSTANT BEFORE THE KNIGHT CAN SWING THE KILLING BLOW...
HE WAS SO CAUGHT UP IN HIS RAVINGS HE NEVER NOTICED THE BUILDING WINDS I'D CONJURED... UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE! EVEN SO, I JUST BARELY HAD TIME TO BRING THEM TO FULL FORCE!
FORTUNATELY, CALLING UP THE WINDS OF THE WATOOMB COMES EASILY TO ME IN THIS INTERDIMENSIONAL ZONE... THAT SUDDEN STABBING PAIN NEARLY RENDERED ME SENSELESS!
SOME SOURCE OF CONSIDERABLE SORCEROUS POWER WAS TURNED AGAINST ME... BUT BY WHOM?
WOULD THAT I WERE FREE TO TRACK THAT POWER TO ITS SOURCE... BUT I DARE NOT! NOW THAT MY CHARADE HAS BEEN EXPOSED, I HAVE NO ALTERNATIVE BUT TO TRY SHOCKING DANE BACK TO HIS RIGHT MIND!
SO... LET THE WINDS CARRY DANE THROUGH THE FANGS OF FARALLAH AND INTO THE REALM OF MADNESS...

"...WHERE ONE'S WORST FEARS TAKE ON PHYSICAL FORM!"
SQUIRM ALL YOU WANT, DANE WHITMAN. IT WILL DO YOU NO GOOD!
NO... NO!!
WHY DO YOU TRY TO TURN AWAY, SIR KNIGHT?
ARE YOU SO AFRAID TO FACE US?
WHAT? THE AVENGERS?! BUT HOW... WHERE--?!
WE HAVE ASSEMBLED HERE TO JUDGE THEE GUILTY... OF BETRAYAL MOST BASE!
THOR'S RIGHT, MISTER! I DON'T KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU BACK IN THE 12TH CENTURY, BUT IT'S TURNED YOU ROTTEN!
THE AVENGERS SPEAK TRUE! YOU HAVE GIVEN IN TO THE POWERS OF DARKNESS... BETRAYED ALL WHO KNEW YOU!
THERE CAN BE BUT ONE PUNISHMENT FOR SUCH A CRIME!
ETERNAL EXILE!
YOU HAVE BECOME A THRALL OF YOUR SWORD! CAST IT OFF, LEST IT CONTROL YOU FOR ALL TIME!
THE SURFER... VALKYRIE... SUB-MARINER! NO, YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!
IT IS YOU WHO REFUSES TO UNDERSTAND, DANE! THEY ONLY ECHO THAT WHICH YOU IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS KNOW TO BE TRUE!
REJECT THE SWORD? BUT... WITHOUT IT I AM HELPLESS!

"IF YOU TRULY BELIEVE THAT," SAYS STRANGE, "THEN ALREADY HAS THE DARKNESS CLAIMED YOU!"
NO...NO, I'LL NOT BE LOST!
"THEN YOU MUST DECIDE...WHO SHALL HAVE CONTROL?
"THE SWORDSMAN...OR THE SWORD? DECIDE NOW! THE DARKNESS GATHERS!"
NO! I REJECT THE WAY OF DARKNESS! AND IF NEED BE--
--I REJECT THIS SWORD!
PRAISE THE VISHANTI, THERE IS YET HOPE!
BUT OUR TRIALS ARE NOT YET OVER, MY FRIEND! COME--
--LET US LEAVE THIS MAZE OF MADNESS BEHIND US! THERE IS EVIL YET TO BE PURSUED!
BACK...BACK THROUGH DIMENSIONS WITHOUT NUMBER STREAKS THE CAST-OFF BLADE, DRAWN BY FORCES IT CANNOT RESIST!


AND FINALLY...
THE BRAZIER--! WE'RE BACK WHERE WE STARTED!
NO, NOT EXACTLY WHERE WE STARTED... BUT IN A MATTER OF MOMENTS WE SHALL BE RETURNED TO EARTH. THERE IS MUCH YOU MUST LEARN IN THAT TIME.
IN CASTING OFF THE SWORD, YOU HAVE BUT TEMPORARILY OVERCOME ITS CURSE. THE EVIL DONE BY YOUR ANCESTOR--AND BY YOU--STILL REMAINS IN THE SWORD...
...BOUND THERE, EVEN AS THE SPIRIT OF SIR PERCY IS BOUND TO THE BRAZIER OF TRUTH!
FOR THE CURSE TO BE BROKEN, THE SWORD AND THE BRAZIER MUST BE CLEANSED AS ONE IN MYSTIC FIRE! THE EVIL THAT MEN DO MUST BE RETURNED TO THEM. I CAN SUPPLY THE FIRE...
...BUT UNLESS YOU TAKE UP THE SWORD TO END THE CURSE, THE MANTLE OF THE BLACK KNIGHT WILL BE LOST TO YOU FOREVER!
IF I TAKE UP THE SWORD, IT WILL TRY TO CONTROL ME AGAIN. BUT IF I DON'T--
--I'LL NEVER KNOW IF I COULD HAVE BEATEN ITS POWER!
I'LL NOT HAVE THAT DOUBT HAUNTING ME THE REST OF MY LIFE! I MUST TAKE MY CHANCES NOW!

STRANGE... I CAN FEEL THE SWORD FIGHTING ME! WHAT DO I DO NEXT?
YOU MUST MAINTAIN CONTROL AND RETURN THE EVIL TO ITS SOURCE! TAKE YOUR BLADE AND PIERCE THE HEART OF THE BRAZIER!
CLEAVE THE BRAZIER OF TRUTH?!?
THAT'S UNTHINKABLE! I CANNOT! I...I...
I MUST! HURRY, STRANGE, PREPARE YOUR SPELLS!
LET THE FIRES BURN! WE MUST END THIS CURSE... HERE AND NOW!


FREE! THANK MERLIN, I AM AT LONG LAST FREE!!
THE BRAZIER ERUPTED IN A MILLION SHARDS! I SHIELDED US JUST IN TIME!
UNTIL THE EVIL I HAD DONE IN LIFE WAS RETURNED TO ME, I COULD KNOW NO LASTING REST. BUT NOW, THE CURSE IS LIFTED, AND I CAN GO TO MEET MY FINAL JUDGEMENT!
YOU HAVE DONE MOST WONDROUSLY WELL BY ME, DANE WHITMAN! KNOW YOU THAT THOUGH MY CURSE IS LIFTED, YOUR SWORD IS YET ENCHANTED! TAKE CARE THAT YOU EMBUE IT WITH NO FURTHER CURSES OF YOUR OWN!
GO FORTH, SIR KNIGHT! AND KNOW THAT YOUR ANCESTOR IS MOST PROUD OF YOU!
MEANWHILE, SEVERAL DOZEN FEET ABOVE...
STEPHEN... DANE... ANYBODY! OPEN THIS...
KREE
EEE
...DOOR.

DANE? STEPHEN? IS EVERYBODY ALL RIGHT?! ANSWER ME!!
HUSH, VICTORIA! DANE HAS BEEN SORELY TESTED, BUT... YES... I BELIEVE HE WILL BE ALL RIGHT NOW.
THINGS WERE SO DEATHLY QUIET DOWN HERE! WHATEVER HAPPENED?
WHAT HAPPENED?
THIS NIGHT, VICTORIA, THE BLACK KNIGHT PUT TO REST THE SOUL OF A VALIANT HERO.
AND IN DOING SO HE SAVED HIS OWN!
END